

Chipyong-ni Narrative

On 5 February 1951 UN forces began a counter offensive north from their positions on the 37th parallel on a line running through Wonju. At this time the US 23rd Infantry Regimental Combat Team (RCT), commanded by Colonel Paul Freeman had been ordered to the crossroads village of Chipyong-ni, roughly on the boundary of the IX and X Corps, 20 miles beyond UN lines.

On 11 February the Chinese struck X Corps with two columns pointed toward Hoengsong and Wonju. This heavy attack slashed through two divisions, forcing withdrawals and leaving the 23rd RCT in an exposed and isolated position. General Ridgeway ordered the regiment to stand fast.

During the night of 13 February, the Chinese offensive shifted direction and moved west to the heart of the 23rd RCT's position and aimed its full force at Chipyong-ni. The fall of the village, an important road junction would threaten the entire west-central front.

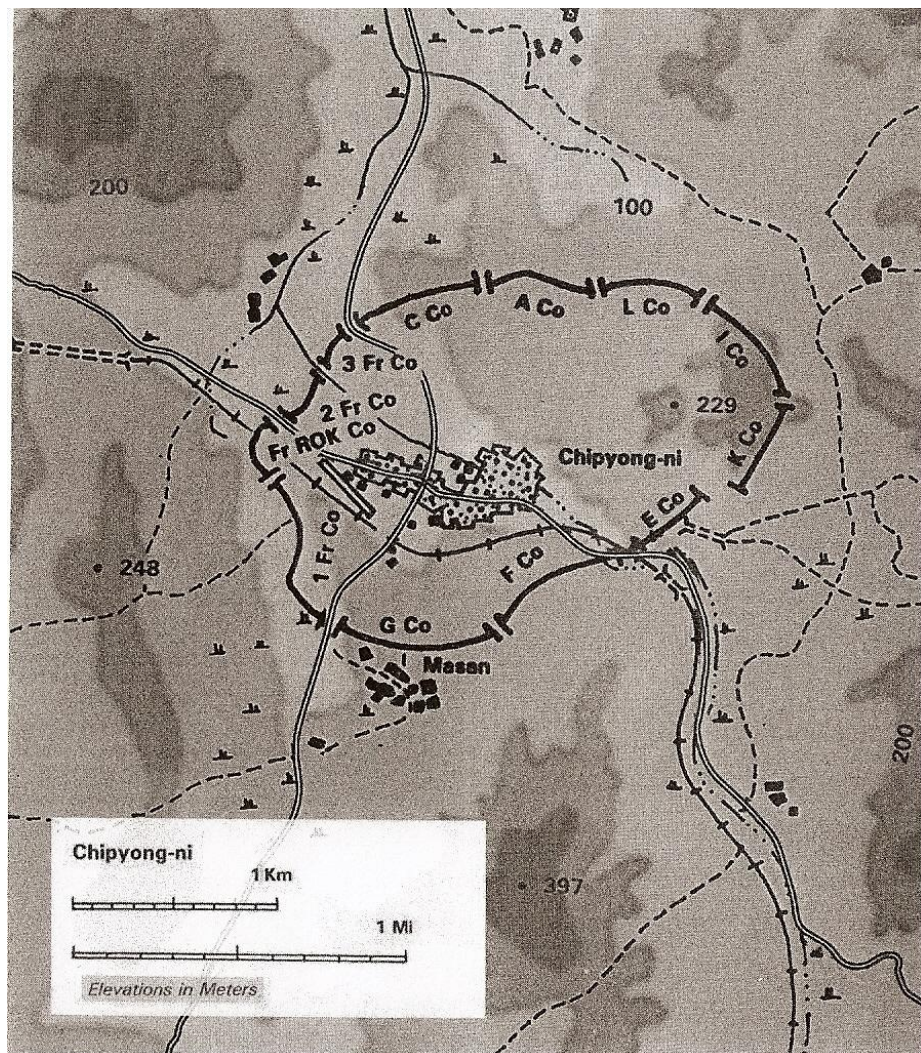
The village of Chipyong-ni lies in an oval-shaped valley three miles wide and six miles long. Gently sloping, the hills which surround the village range from 100 to 400 meters high (in February 1951 the hills were bare). The Chinese seized the dominating hills surrounding the village and cut off all supply and evacuation routes, forcing the Colonel Freeman to draw his defensive perimeter tightly around Chipyong-ni, using the gentle slopes affording the best fields of fire. In setting his perimeter defense, Colonel Freeman occupied the ring of low lying hills surrounding the town rather than the more easily defendable hills further out that would have required more men to occupy than he had available.

When established, the circular clock-like defense placed the 1st Battalion (A and C Companies) on the perimeter from the 12 to the 1 o'clock position. The 3rd Battalion (I, L, and K Companies) occupied the hills from the 2 to the 5 o'clock position. The 2nd Battalion (E, F, and G Companies) occupied the 5 to 7 o'clock position. The French Battalion, in the west, occupied the 7 to 11 o'clock position. B Company and the 1st Ranger Company were inside the perimeter behind A and C Companies.

In the late afternoon and evening of 13 February there was heavy flare activity around the entire perimeter. Small arms and mortar fire began to fall inside the perimeter between 2200 and 2300 from the northwest, north, and southeast. Shortly before midnight an intense mortar and artillery barrage crashed into the perimeter's northern sector held by the 1st Battalion and when it lifted the long expected attack began. Bugles, whistles, and yells sounded over the cold night air, dull red and green flares burst and hung in the sky and the arcs of tracers flashed and ricocheted through the dark. By midnight only the 2nd Battalion was not engaged. Mortar and artillery fire rained down on the regimental CP and the artillery positions. The 1st Battalion CP was set on fire by the tracers.

Shortly after midnight the fighting ceased, but a fresh attack was launched from the north and northwest at 0100. The rushing yelling enemy was repulsed but as the firing died down, the troops on the perimeter could hear the sound of shovels as the Chinese dug in.

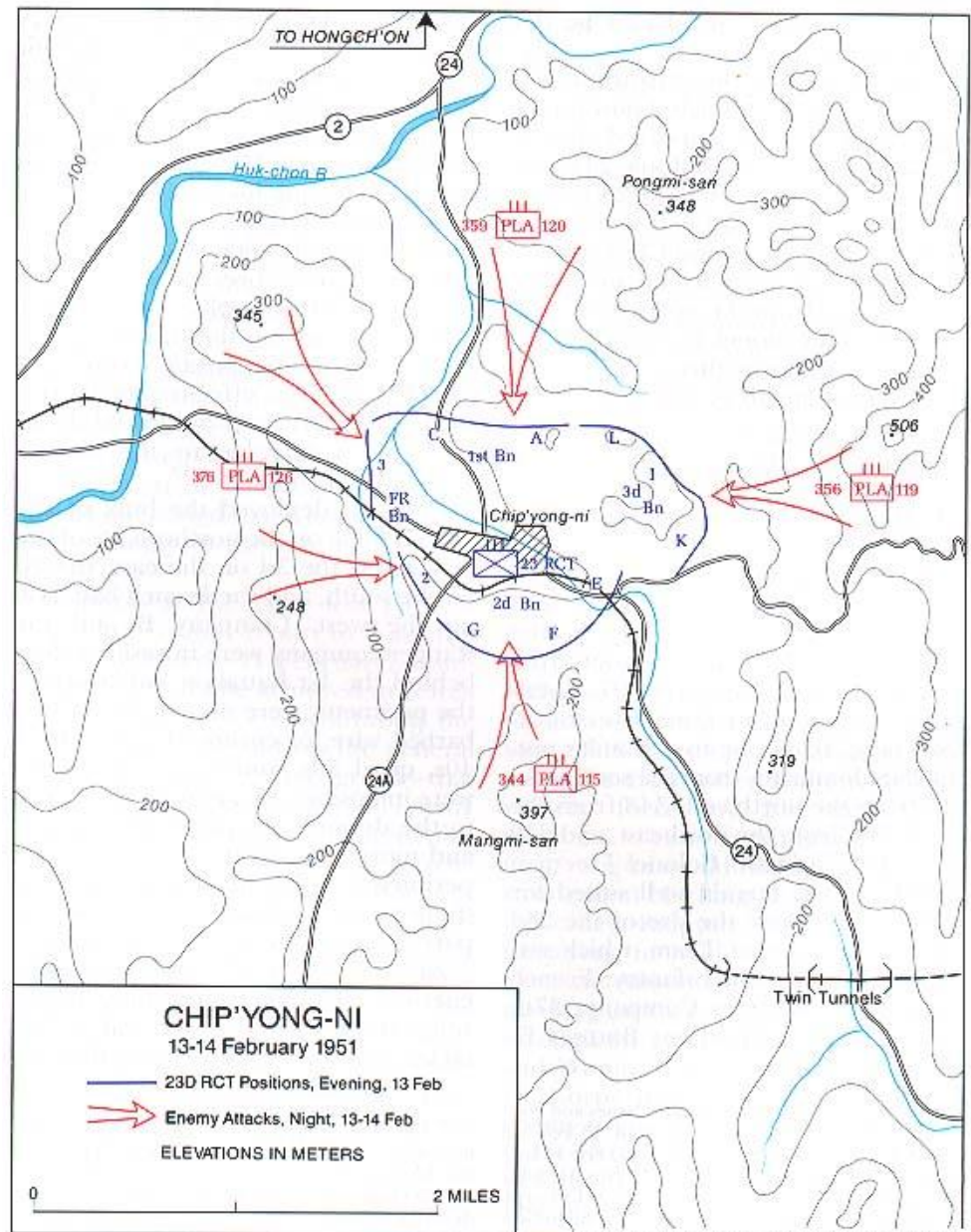
At 0215 the weight of the attack shifted when



the Chinese launched a bloody frontal assault from the southwest and east against K Company. The perimeter held and continuing their pressure on the south the Chinese hurled themselves at the French in the north in an attempt to pierce the perimeter. As the waves of attackers struck the French battalion, intense pressure on C Company forced a slight withdrawal, but an immediate counterattack regained the lost ground. The entire perimeter blazed with fire as the artillery fired round after round into the ranks of the determined attackers as the infantrymen did the same. By 0530 enemy pressure had eased except in front of the French Battalion and K Company both repulsed multiple attacks.

At first light on 14 February, the Chinese attempted to slice their way into Chipyeong-ni through K and I Companies. The perimeter held elsewhere and the battered assault troops of the 5 Chinese divisions surrounding Chipyeong-ni retreated under mortar, artillery, and small arms fire. The coming of daylight saw a break in the action. The Chinese, fearing the devastating effect of observer-directed artillery fire and close air support withdrew and used intermittent mortar fire during the day to harass the besieged garrison.

Colonel Freeman received reports of increased enemy activity in the late afternoon of 14 February. At 2300 the Chinese began a mortar barrage on K Company and at midnight C Company was receiving fire and could hear the Chinese digging in. In spite of the air dropped ammunition there was a critical shortage of 8-round clips of M-1 ammunition with the entire supply in the hands of the companies. Shortly



MAP 23

From: Ebb And Flow, November 1950-July 1951
 Center of Military History, 1990
 By Billy C. Mossman

after full darkness the first Chinese assault of the night fell on the 2nd Battalion sector. Simultaneously, the regimental CP came under and intense barrage of mortar, artillery, and small arms fire, which spread over the course of an hour to cover the positions of the mortar company and the trains of the French Battalion. The fighting on the perimeter increased in intensity with both the 2nd and 3rd Battalions engaged in close combat as the Chinese sought to drive a wedge in the perimeter. Bugles signaled new attacks.

K Company was struck at 0130 and repulsed two assaults as the pressure mounted again in the south and southwest. Ammunition shortages threatened to

become critical and a radio message for relief went through the 2nd Infantry Division to Japan where the supply services of the Japan Logistical Command loaded waiting planes through the night so air drops to resupply the garrison could be made at first light.

On 14 February at 2030 the Chinese made their first penetration into the perimeter driving into the I Company position. An immediate counterattack by I and L Companies drove the Chinese out, restoring the position after a hand-to-hand battle. It seemed impossible that the perimeter could continue to withstand the numerically superior foe's mounting pressure.

At 0315 on 15 February C Company reported a second penetration and that all efforts to stop it had failed; C Company withdrew suffering heavy casualties. The new regimental commander, Lieutenant Colonel John H. Chiles (who had been flown in to replace Colonel Freeman after he was wounded in a mortar barrage on 14 February) ordered a composite force assembled to counterattack. The 1st Ranger Company, a platoon from F Company and the remnants of G Company gathered to attack while in the north A and C Companies beat off several attacks.

The composite counterattack force struck at the enemy penetration at 0615. Hand-to-hand fighting raged as the Chinese attempted to hold onto their gains. The attacking American force suffered mounting casualties as each attempt to move forward was repulsed. B Company, the only remaining reserve, was ordered to join the attack against the penetration at 0800 but was pinned down under murderous fire. The situation was desperate. At 1230 the relief column (Task Force Crombez) was 9,000 yards southwest of its goal but its progress toward the seriously threatened garrison was slow against the fire from every side.

At 1400, with B Company still pinned down, air strikes were called in on the enemy entrenched in the gap in the perimeter. After the aircraft dropped napalm on the Chinese, the burned and screaming survivors withdrew and B Company rose, fired into the retreating Chinese, advanced and regained the lost position.

Amid the battle, planeload after planeload of ammunition was dropped to the garrison. Chinese mortar fire, falling into the drop zones inflicted heavy casualties on the troops as they exposed themselves to retrieve the ammunition and other supplies.

B Company, having secured the lost positions by 1630 jubilantly reported it could see the head of the tank column pushing forward to relieve the garrison. The Chinese abandoned their attack and fled from the armor column. With relief in sight the 23rd's artillery fired on the fleeing enemy, inflicting enormous casualties.

Twenty heavy tanks and a handful of infantrymen from the 5th Cavalry rolled into the perimeter at 1725. The exhausted victorious defenders realized the battle had ended as a strange silence descended over the valley.